

Gender segregation

My father and I had rented a car for his stay, and drove out to a farm just after breakfast. We arrived at approximately 9:00 am, and the family had just read their morning prayer. We went inside so that my father could meet the people he had heard so much about, and after a short visiting in the kitchen he joined the farmer at the barn where they worked on one of the buggies. The sons helped their father, as well as a non-Amish friend that had stopped by. I remained in the kitchen, helping the women clean the kitchen after breakfast. When we finished, I went out to the barn to talk to the men. I soon went back inside as it was time to prepare dinner, which is usually at noon. We cooked vegetables from the garden and had chicken that we had slaughtered. We also made the traditional dressing Amish make. Before we ate, we bowed our heads in silent prayer. We knew the prayer was over when the father of the house moved slightly on his chair. After we had eaten, we bowed our heads to pray again. My father and the Amish father took their seats in the living room, while the women (including myself) started to clean up after dinner. As I entered the living room to serve the two men coffee and homemade doughnuts, it occurred to me how gender segregated this house was. I knew that Amish use gender as an organising feature, but it was never as evident to me as now that my father was visiting. The mother of the house and I spoke a bit with the men, although we never sat down with them as would be the case if the Amish family had visited us. It just did not seem appropriate. Later that afternoon my father and I drove the mother and father to a nearby village, as they had to run some errands. We also stopped by an Amish buggy store, where several men were working on orders from all over America and also from the other side of the Atlantic. It was getting close to suppertime so we headed home, and again, my father joined the men in the barn. I found myself preparing supper in the kitchen with the women, as if it was the most natural thing for me to do. Again, before supper, we shared a silent prayer that was repeated after the meal. We had sausage with all that goes with it. After we all participated in finishing up today's chores in the barn, my father and I headed back to the Bed & Breakfast we were staying at.